

VZCZCXRO6515
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHGO #0082/01 0200003
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 200003Z JAN 06
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3950
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0536
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9326
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 3937
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1418
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3113
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6427
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4036
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0540
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0528
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2475
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0149
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 RANGOON 000082

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [SNAR](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA'S PRO-AMERICAN KACHIN STATE

REF: A. 05 RANGOON 1281

[1](#)B. 05 RANGOON 1256

RANGOON 00000082 001.2 OF 005

Classified By: CDA Shari Villarosa for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Charge traveled to Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State in northernmost Burma, Jan 8-10 and met with interlocutors from a variety of different organizations representative of the Kachin people, one of Burma's seven main ethnic minority groups. She heard the same themes repeatedly, almost verbatim. First and foremost, the Kachin face increasing marginalization and discrimination in their own state. As a result, the Kachin ethnic groups we met desired a federal system of government that gives them greater autonomy than at present. Secondly, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, and poor education further threaten their well-being. And finally, they remember fondly their ties to the United States initially established by American missionaries in the 19th century and reinforced by the U.S. military during WWII. Their repeated expressions of desire that their American "big brothers" return no doubt fuel Burmese military paranoia and oppression against the Kachin. While the multiplicity of organizations revealed the factionalism all too common throughout Burma, numerous Kachins have tried to make positive contributions to the development of the Kachin people by working around the regime. END SUMMARY.

KACHIN DISPOSSESSED OF POWER IN THEIR OWN STATE

[1](#)2. (C) The Charge heard consistent tales of ethnic Kachin displacement from civil and military service, state and township government, business opportunities, and even subsistence agriculture. Until ten years ago, the Kachin (comprised of 8 clans) predominated in local and state government. However, according to several of our interlocutors, no Kachin is represented in senior state or local government positions nor in the civil service; ethnic

Burmans hold all those positions. According to local NLD executive committee member Aung Soe, even teaching is off limits to Kachin. We heard repeatedly that no Kachin today can rise above a mid-level civil servant or a captain or major in the military. The NLD cited examples of Kachin pilots seeing their ethnic Burman students promoted over them.

13. (C) Nor does the business community offer opportunities for Kachins. The only way to succeed in business requires "bribing or otherwise compromising themselves before the authorities," according to NLD leader Aung Soe and others. As a result, our interlocutors could only name two or three prominent Kachin businessmen. "The most successful people are Chinese and Indian," Baptist leader Rev. Hkum Paulu claimed, a sentiment echoed by others. However, when pressed, they admitted that most of these ethnic Chinese and Indians had been living in Kachin state for many years. Chinese from present-day China have bought up many of the jade mining concessions, which has displaced poorer Kachins, who used to be able to supplement their incomes by mining small plots during the off season for agriculture. According to Rev. Paulu and others, the new companies have set up highly mechanized operations, which employ far fewer workers, and strictly protect their concessions from would-be small miners.

14. (C) Most Kachins farm at the subsistence level. The average person in Kachin State, according to Rev. Paulu, "works very hard, but earns a very little amount." The cooler climate in Kachin State would be ideal for growing flowers, citrus and other high-value seasonal crops, like berries. However, with little irrigation, most farmers can only grow one rice crop a year. During the non-growing season, poor Kachins seek work in the jade and gold mines or

RANGOON 00000082 002.2 OF 005

the sex industry, often leaving their children home alone. According to a local NGO based in Kachin state to promote sustainable development (METTA), even if farmers manage to grow enough rice or vegetables for profit, a stable local market for vegetables does not exist and it lacks the transportation infrastructure to ship the crops to larger markets. According to religious organizations and NGOs, this lack of vegetables contributes to widespread child malnutrition in Kachin State.

15. (C) The easiest cash crop is opium poppy, claim Kachin leaders. Drug traffickers offer farmers cash up front and arrange for the transportation of the poppy harvest straight off the farms, according to METTA Director Seng Raw. As a result, the Assistant Secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention said that farmers "have the mentality that if only they can grow poppy, their life will be stable." Recently, different organizations attempted to promote cottage industries, such as weaving, but they soon discovered insufficient capital to market the products. The Burmese military has also tried to exploit Kachin's agricultural potential by planting rubber trees despite the state having the climate of Colorado. Apparently the northern military commander had previously served in the far south where rubber does well and decided he could profit from current high world prices for rubber. As a result, the military evicted hundreds of villagers to plant 1000 acres of rubber, according to METTA project coordinators. The villagers were then forcibly moved to alternative land with minimal compensation and no support to reestablish their small farms.

16. (C) METTA also cited another telling example of Burmese military in action. Kachin State is situated in a major migratory bird flight path, and attracts birdwatchers from around the world. Recently a rare, endangered Siberian crane was spotted along the banks of the Irrawaddy River. The large bird dancing on the riverbank began to attract large numbers of gazers. Eventually they included the military, who proceeded to shoot the rare bird.

AND FACE RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

17. (C) The Kachin people are predominantly Christian, in large part due to American missionaries who came to the area in the 19th century. We observed wider English comprehension and fluency than is the norm elsewhere outside of Rangoon, likely due to the missionary schools closed by former prime minister Ne Win in the 1960s. Baptist and Catholic leaders described expanding congregations, but tighter space constraints since the authorities restrict their ability to build new churches, especially on main roads. The Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) said they got around the restrictions by building "training center" away from the main road. Asked why KBC membership had surpassed 300,000, Rev. Paulu replied, "Because the Kachin people are suffering a lot and want a way out of their lives." Others offered additional examples of religious discrimination. U Sin Wa, the Head of the Kachin Consultative Assembly (KCA), said that a Kachin officer candidate had to leave the military academy after he refused to convert to Buddhism. According to Wa, all Kachin are required to write Buddhist as their religious affiliation on official papers, despite the fact that most Kachins are Christian. Meanwhile, all of the religious leaders willing offered their political opinions. Catholic priest Gregory Nowdin reflected the consensus: "We are looking for peace and human rights. As minorities, we are seeking more federal rights." However, he also revealed that factionalism exists even among the religious groups, after noting with some envy that the Baptists were in general richer, he claimed that the Baptists always fight with each other.

RANGOON 00000082 003.2 OF 005

CHILDREN RECIVE POOR EDUCATION; ROOM TO DO MORE EXISTS

18. (C) Everywhere we visited, the most frequent request was for educational assistance, especially scholarships. The military regime has tried to strictly control education throughout the country, which most Burmese blame for the steady decline in quality. Kachin National Congress for Democracy MP-elect Duwa G. Bawn Lang harshly criticized the educational system: "The current situation in the education sector is meaningless. Even a teacher is like a student. Even though they don't have the skills, they can be a teacher." KCA leader Sin Wa expressed regret that Kachin literature no longer is permitted to be taught in the government-run schools. However, various Kachin organizations have managed to find small openings to provide improved primary education. The Baptists and Catholics have been permitted to set up schools in remote areas, where no government schools exist, using volunteers. The Kachin Baptist Convention also educates 1,500 orphans, whose numbers increase as more and more parents die of AIDS. The Shalom Foundation works with schools in the areas controlled by the armed Kachin insurgent groups to promote the "child-centered approach." METTA also promotes the child-centered approach and provides rice to parents who allow their children to attend school. METTA has also managed to offer its programs in government-run schools by securing the agreement of villagers to keep the assistance quiet from township officials.

NGOS CREATIVE IN COMBATTING HIV/AIDS

19. (C) Kachin State has experienced rising rates of HIV/AIDS infection as a result of drug abuse, predominantly among male miners and increasing numbers of sex workers. The Charge met with several groups providing HIV/AIDS-related services, including two religious organizations, Population Services International, and Medicins du Monde (MDM). All of them mentioned working extensively with the Dutch NGO, AZG. MDM

has established a number of creative initiatives to provide preventative health, psychological counseling, and social services to male and female sex workers. Although MDM cannot work outside Myitkyina, they established a peer education program to train sex workers from outside the town about HIV/AIDS prevention. Since police crackdowns regularly target brothels in Myitkyina, sex workers have been forced out of town. The only one brothel to escape harassment is patronized by government officials, according to MDM. Most sex workers work under grim conditions in the mining areas. "Most men are on drugs, most houses are brothels - there is no safe place to stay during the night," according MDM Dr. Thida. The doctor added that in urban areas, prostitution carries a stigma, but in rural areas it is not uncommon for families to send their young women "to liquor shops to make a living for the family." Most of these women have a primary education, she said, though some are illiterate.

DEMOCRATIC PARTIES FORCED UNDERGROUND

¶10. (C) NLD leaders in Kachin have had their offices closed by the military regime and banned from holding any functions.

(NLD has been permitted to keep its headquarters open only in Rangoon). Yet Kachin NLD Secretary Ne Win said they have managed to hold quiet political discussions with supporters. NLD leaders noted that two Kachins, who had become too active, were recently arrested in Shan State for possessing drugs allegedly planted on them. While they complained that most civil service jobs and business opportunities go to outsiders, they said that a few businessmen support the NLD, which the businessmen must keep quiet if they want to keep their businesses. One NLD leader said he was able to survive

RANGOON 00000082 004.2 OF 005

because he has farms, but other known NLD supporters have faced a loss of business due to regime pressures. "People suffer in their mind," said party Chairman U Saing, "but cannot speak out. NLD members in Kachin are undereducated and poor, but they will fight to the end for what is right." He discounted any threat from the regime's mass member organization, United Solidarity and Development Association (USDA,) since its members have generally been forced to join to keep their jobs.

¶11. (C) The Kachin National Congress for Democracy (KNCD) has been de-registered by the regime and the party's secretary and chairman arrested. But youth leaders have

SIPDIS

been able to hold informal meetings under the guise of social events to educate people about their political rights and "to respect their vote made in 1990." The KNCD say the elderly instruct the youth on the Kachin preference for "a federalist, democratic system." The youth leaders welcomed any books or other resources the U.S. could provide; we offered to send materials on federalism, political parties, and democratic development. Of the three KNCD MPs elected in 1990, only one survives. The surviving MP-Elect described his difficulties traveling in country, alleging that he is followed, and the authorities had instructed airlines and the railroad against selling him a ticket. However, he said that he could elude the local authorities by taking a boat downriver to Mandalay.

ATTEMPTS AT CONFLICT RESOLUTION

¶12. (C) At least three armed Kachin groups exist, the largest of which is the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), although a ceasefire agreement was reached with the Burmese military in 1995. We met with Rev. Saboi Jum, who heads the Shalom Foundation charged by the Kachin factions and the military regime to broker a peace settlement. He proclaimed the ambitious goal of achieving a nationwide peace among all of the armed groups, primarily operating in ethnic

minority areas around the country. "We want to have a stable peace," he said. "But 50 years of internal conflict has left us unable to trust each other." Shalom Assistant Director L. Ja Nan announced plans to form a "Peace Committee" to "educate people so they could make an informed choice" during the national referendum to take place following the conclusion of the National Convention "because our country has never voted before." "You voted in 1990, didn't you?" responded the Charge and asked how Shalom planned to educate the people since no debate about a new constitution is permitted and nothing has been presented in writing. The Charge expressed skepticism that the military would allow a free and fair referendum after taking great pains to create a constitution that served only the regime's ends. Jum admitted that he knew the regime was not "sincere" and sought Charge's suggestions on how to prepare the public for the eventual referendum. Noting that disunity among the democratic forces has helped keep the military in power, she suggested Shalom could usefully build common areas of agreement among all pro-democracy supporters.

¶13. (C) While the various Kachin religious, political, and armed organizations have found it difficult to work together to achieve shared goals, the newly created Kachin Consultative Assembly stood out as the notable exception. The KCA works to protect and promote the rights and development of the Kachin people while the Kachin ceasefire groups struggle to survive, said KCA leaders. Although the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) set up the KCA, the KCA has gained the confidence of the New Democratic Army Kachin (NDA-K) to mediate a conflict between the KIO and NDA-K over mining and logging concessions given to them by the military regime as part of the cease-fire.

RANGOON 00000082 005.2 OF 005

THE MANAU FESTIVAL BRINGS EVERYONE TOGETHER

¶14. (C) All Kachins come together once a year for an annual festival commemorating their independence (six days after national independence). There is actually no such individual as a Kachin, but rather a loose grouping of eight clans that likely migrated from Tibet hundreds of years ago. The armed Kachin factions are permitted to wear their uniforms without weapons; the Burmese military put away their weapons for a few days; and the Kachins don their tribal costumes and parade around the Manau poles -- towering, colorfully painted timbers. Joining the dancers was a large contingent of prosperous looking ethnic Kachins from China all driving large new SUVs, dressed in suits, and wearing sunglasses. Even the scorned USDA paraded -- without much enthusiasm, maybe because they were the smallest group at the big dance. The Kachin armed ranks included women and men, some of whom appeared to be no more than 15 or 16. Shalom Foundation appeared in charge of protocol. The KNCD youth leaders directed the dancers youth on proper saber rattling and hip swinging as they marched and danced their way around the Manau poles. The Chairman of the Festival, one of the few Kachin to own mining and logging concessions, warmly welcomed one and all, including Charge and two foreign women from Global Witness hoping to use the festival to gather information about the rapid deforestation in the area. At a celebratory dinner he sat Charge in the seat of honor and publicly urged the Kachin's American "big brothers" to return. The Global Witness women were also given prominent seats at the "First Wives" table. The Burmese military officers genially greeted them as well. The Northern Military Commander's wife and daughter came dressed in full Jinghpaw (one of the Kachin clans) attire to show their goodwill, and no one begrudged them for really being ethnic Burmans.

¶15. (C) COMMENT: We heard many of the same complaints heard around the country: deteriorating conditions, business increasingly directed to those connected to the military, and

bad agricultural decisions made by the military in the name of development. We also heard accounts common to all the ethnic minorities--villagers arbitrarily dispossessed of land, forced labor, religious and ethnic discrimination--which only fuels the ongoing resentment of the Burmese military. Only some sort of system of government which returns significant control to the Kachins over their own affairs will persuade the Kachins to lay down their weapons. The fighting forces have some access to cash by selling logs to the Chinese, which will no doubt cause bigger problems in the future. Opium cultivation remains an possibility. While we sensed no real enthusiasm to resume armed action against the Burmese, we did sense real determination to insist on democracy along federal lines. The strength of Kachin warmth towards the United States came as a surprise. Their wide exposure to American missionaries and/or the U.S. military built an enduring friendship. Sadly their evident goodwill towards us just fuels Burmese military paranoia that outside forces foment rebellion against them, as opposed to the military's wrong-headed oppressive tactics. We will explore low-key ways to assist our Kachin friends in their struggle for freedom and democracy--values we taught them, which they still share.

VILLAROSA